

To Va

Before Xmas
mom

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

BY

NELLIE BURGET MILLER



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TO
MY THREE CHILDREN

Who have had the magnanimity to pretend that they prefer a new poem to pudding or pie, this first volume of verse is lovingly addressed.

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PROEM

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

SO here we have our treasure in an earthen
bowl,

Distorted, marred, and set to common use,

And some will never see beyond the form of clay,

And some will stoop to peer within and softly say,

"There is a wondrous radiance prisoned there

And I heard the stir of an angel's wing."

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

*So here we have our treasure in an earthen bowl,
Distorted, marred, and set to common use:
And some will never see beyond the form of clay,
And some will stoop and peer within and softly say
"There is a wondrous radiance prisoned there
And I heard the stir of an angel's wing."*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

TO A CERTAIN POET I HAVE
KNOWN

LIKE bits of rare old porcelain,
So exquisite and fine,
Translucent, nectar-filled,

Thy verses shine;
Beside them, just an empty earthen bowl,
These formless songs of mine!

Yet it may be some thirsting soul
Shall stoop with eager lip
To drain this poor coarse bowl,
And, grateful, find within its depths distilled
A few sweet drops of that same spirit wine
Which fills thy brimming chalice up;
For so the Master blesses oft the common cup
To use divine.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

HIDDEN FIRE

IN my dream I came to the shrine of my life's
desire
And begged but one spark from the "Master of
Hidden Fire."

Into the chalice of my lifted soul
The Spirit dropped one glowing coal;
Swift through the baffled shades of night
That rose-red cup took eager flight,
Upborne on vibrant wings of light.
"Look now within thy soul and sing!"
Bade the Angel of Wind and Fire.

Then on soft pinions of desire
From out that chalice, all afire
With love and longing, fluttering came
A host of wingéd baby things,
With murmurings of joy ineffable;

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

A strange new name,

Falling like a soft caress

On the heart of happiness;

Echoes of all songs, unsung;

A scarf of living colors flung

Across the night's black pall;

And somewhere, over all,

A silver flute-note,

Sobbing upon the air,

Then falling mute—

When into my dream the Dawn, like a gray nun
stole,

I woke . . . Within my hands an empty earthen
bowl.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

WORDS

I WOULD build, and I have no tools;
I will fashion a house with words.

Grim granite words for foundations firm,

Fast-cemented together;

Timbers of strong live words, smooth-hewn and
close-fitted;

Then I will seek shining words of hope,

And of these I will make me windows

Through which I may look afar.

I would sing, and I have no harp;

Of words I will make me a tune.

I shall choose laughing, singing, rippling words

And those that skip and dance;

All the tender endearing words that the mother-
birds use

At twilight and dawning;

And then a few sad little words I shall hide

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Under the whole, right stealthily,
Like the trickling of silent tears.

No easel or canvas have I,
But with words I will paint.
Bright blotches from full tubes laid on,
Rapture of sunset and promise of dawn;
Then at my mood shall the colors fade
To the sober tints of a sparrow's wing,
Cold and gray as a twilight of March,
With a haunting hint of the Spring.
I would fly, and I have no wings;
Of words I will make me a prayer.

I shall use wingéd words that dare and aspire,
Words of passion and words of fire;
Strange new words out of silence grown
That cry to the heart of God alone—
I would fly, and nothing I have but words,
But with words I can make me a prayer.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

DUALITY

WITH Martha's hands I knead the
bread

And wash the linen white,

For there are those who must be fed

And find fresh beds at night;

But, oh, the Mary-heart of me,

The wistful Mary-heart,

That longs to find one hour free

To rest and dream apart—

But Martha's brood must still be kept

Though Mary's heart make moan,

And Martha's house must still be swept

Though the Master sit alone.

And so I turn with troubled heart

Too tired, now, to understand

Why I, who choose the better part,

Am still constrained by Martha's hand.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

TRUANCY

SOMETIMES when I would merry
be,

Bid friends to spend the day,
My soul takes out its rosary
And steals aside to pray;
Murmuring soft aves, o'er and o'er,
Like some gray cloistered nun
Upon a cold bare convent floor
It prays till day is done.

But when in sober Sabbath mood,
I go to church to pray,
Within some dear remembered wood
My truant soul will stray;

It romps with dryads down the glen,
With quite unseemly pagan glee,
And only with the last amen
Comes creeping, penitent, to me.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
QUESTION

WILL you tell me, Mistress April,
How the spring comes on

In a certain little town

I know?

Do not tell me it is backward there,

And slow!

Is it green along the river?

Have they fixed the water-gap

And does the old mill grind?

Do the children find hepaticas, still,

On the shady side of Walker's hill?

Are the gardens plowed

And the plum-trees popped out white?

Do the lilacs bud?

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

And the robins call for rain
In a trickling tune, half-joy
And more than half pain,
In the waning light?

Is there still somewhere
A breath of burning brush
Upon the air?
And does the lazy Dusk
Come trailing across the pasture-lot
With a star in her hair?

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
SONNET SEQUENCE

APRIL MOODS

Imagination

ASLIM moon is moored to my lilac-tree,
afloat,

A wind from the west in its sleep, sighs lazily,
And I must away for the shores of the mystical
sea

That washes the sands of infinity—there's my
boat—

And April's here! Where's my oil-skin coat?

And my old torn net? What catches, ye gods,
there may be

Where strange fish play in the purple shoals for
me!

I must lend to this eerie adventure a practical
note.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Ah, April, you siren! Your lovers are lost, I
know,

But I swear by the sacred bowl of the Great
Horn Spoon,

If I come back at all from your charms, it will
be too soon—

I have loosened my moorings and gladly drift free
To a land of sheer wonder—that never shall be—
Your kiss is on my mouth—and I must go!

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Memory

I DREAD thy coming, April—dread the
keen pain

That stabs me with remembering. . . . I fear
The willows bourgeoning—I shrink to hear
The drone of a drowsy bee in maudlin strain,
And to see the hooded hosts of the marching rain
Retreat at the robin's rallying-cry of cheer.
How shall I bear it when the sky grows clear
And thy warm kiss wakens the sleeping earth
again?

As one who struggles up a mountain height
In wonder as the widening views unfold,
Passes the summit unaware, to find
His path leads downward now in gathering night—
So I have left, unconsciously, my youth behind,
How shall I bear thee, April,—now I'm old?

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Homing

SOME day, Beloved, I shall hear your call,
I think 'twill be when wreaths of haw-
thorn whiten

The country lanes, and early buttercups
brighten

The pasture-lots. It will not be in fall,

I know—when brown leaves drift like a shrouding
pall

O'er the sad earth. Not when white flakes
lighten

The gray still air. Not when yule-logs heighten
The gloom without that I shall break life's thrall.

One star will hang for a light in the gray-green
gloaming,

I shall find a wisp of a cloud for a bridal-veil,

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

And never the sound of a sigh or a keening
wail,

As into the velvet vastness I go homing—

Beloved, I stand at the door in the dusk and
wait—

Did April come too soon? Or Death too late?

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

A MORNING IN AN OLD LIBRARY

THE sun has been very busy all the
morning

Setting bright new patches on the old gray walls

With diligence unscriptural;

Running curious fingers

Over dingy rows of well-worn books

Looking for dust;

Pointing scornfully

At certain upstart volumes,

Prinking garishly

In red and purple petticoats,

Shocking the staid respectability

Of the best old families;

Coaxing mellow tones of green and amber

From dim tapestries

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

And lighting up the frayed and faded rugs
With unexpected crimson;
Lingering approvingly
Upon the sentimental faces of an old-time print;
Peering officiously
Within the cushioned depths of rusty leather
 chair,
To catch some idle dreamer
Napping there.

Very busy in the corner of a dusty pane
Drones a boisterous drunken fly,
Wakened prematurely,
Tippling gloriously
On the rare sweet wine of April,
Reeling shamelessly,—
Shade of Omar,
With your jug beneath the vine,
Beware!

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

I, too, am busy in my quiet corner,
Like a gray old spider spinning
Long-drawn threads of silken words;
Like a crafty spider weaving
Curious webs of interlacing thought,
Just to make a snare
For some radiant passing fancy—
Hope to catch it unaware.
Faint sweet musty odor of rare old yellow volumes
Mixed with breath of drifting plum-bloom
In the air;
Guilty sense of something else I should be doing
Round the house somewhere,
Making joyous dalliance
Doubly fair!

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
ENCHANTMENT

THE hosts of Ariel draw near to-night,
With brooding wings the air is palpi-
tant;

Yon shadowy moth now flits, now poises light
Above the sleeping flowers, hesitant,
Like sorcerer, gray, to weave a mystic spell
About my garden. Down a moonbeam, pale,
Some tricky sprite just slid with teasing tale
Of elfin revelry. From yonder dell
I could have sworn I heard the scraping shoon
Of faerie folk who hide them from the moon.
Now from the swaying line in troubled rows
Like huddled ghosts, in dreams, the drying
clothes
Gleam wraithlike. All things allure with strange
delight
Transmuted by the witchery of night.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

MADISON CAWEIN

FROM southern meadows set with berry-
blossoms,

He voiced the gladness of the common earth;
The whippoorwill's wild call in wooded glooms,
The breath of dawn, the rose's dewy birth
Were in his morning strain. Through sultry air
Lured on by hermit brooks, he wandered long;
He gathered weeds and found them, Oh, so fair!
Then minor strains crept through his noonday
song,

Sad notes of grief and human sympathy.
Upon the way to lands of dreams-come-true
A host of phantoms bore him company;
Ere yet her purple folds the twilight drew,
Through starry certitudes, like Uther's son,
He passed, and *singing* still, to Avalon.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

“CHAUTAUQUA IN APPLE BLOSSOM TIME”

HA V E you seen the blue of lake and sky
And white sails creeping across the bay
Through a vista of apple trees in May?
Have you heard the robin's mad delight,
As he pleads for rain in the waning light
To a white cloud passing by?

Have you seen the old trees rise and toss
Their rose-flecked foam before a shower,
And a sudden gale make the white sails dip,
While soft on your cheek the petals fall
Like the touch of a baby's lip?
Then you can never forget that hour.

Oh, apple-blooms on a sky of blue,
With glint of the water smiling through!
Though you may wander in desert way
Far from that grassy path in May,
Its beauty will heal you by its power,
You will feel the touch of a wind-tossed flower!

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
WHEN TWILIGHT COMES

WHEN twilight comes, o'er all the
penitential air

Of sweet repentant Day, there falls the hush of
prayer ;

Deep in the west one splash of color glows,
Where careless Day dropped down one crimson
rose

Upon pale Evening's dusky hair.

O, fleeting time, of all the radiant hours most fair !
Brief time when souls the universal soul may
share,

The brooding worlds their deepest truths disclose,
When twilight comes.

One candle lights the pale-green eastern sky ; one
golden candle gleaming where

The faint, sad Night lies dreaming. Dim, priestly
moths some ghostly consolation bear

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

To suppliant blossoms in my garden there, and
nestling buds that shall unclose

With Dawn's first kiss, a glad expectance hold;
around them flows

Soft-breathing peace. . . . For to a garden, as of
old, God doth repair,

When twilight comes.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

I HAVE LOVED HOMELY THINGS

I HAVE loved homely things,
The scent of fresh-dried linen, and the warm
earth

After rain;
The sight of a hollyhock, freshly-crimson,
Outside the pane.

I have loved quiet things,
Slow-moving shadows of the windmill's fingers
Above the well at noon;
And drowsy murmur of three cottonwoods
Gaunt against the moon.

I have loved small things,
Moist sticky fingers of baby-hands
Within my own;
And under my feet three stumbling puppies,
Clumsy and overgrown.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Mansions are for the city-bred,
But for country-folks like me,
God keeps a cottage with hollyhocks,
A child, a well, and a tree,
And a kitten or two, maybe.

AT TIMBERLINE

*At Timberline strange forms must grow,
Cut off alike from peak above and vale below;
Strange seeking forms that dimly know
The peace of sunlit silences
Where earth-bound roots can never go.*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

AT TIMBERLINE

SLOWLY I turned and my bitter question flung

Full in the face of Life:

What jest is this to set me thus apart,

Sport of the mad wind's fray,

To bear within my riven heart

Scars where the lightnings struck

In wanton play?

And Life replied: At timberline

Strange forms must grow,

Cut off alike from peak above

And vale below;

Strange seeking forms that dimly know

The peace of sunlit silences

Where earth-bound roots can never grow.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Oh Life, I cried, if I must be
A dwarfed and barren tree
Alone at timberline,
Send me the storm's sardonic glee
I'll count each scar a victory—
I will not whine—
I have grown patient in these solitudes—

But this, I hold, is such a piteous thing,
To feel within my barren breast
The urge of bloom that comes with spring!

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
IMPROVISATIONS

Drought

THE sun drops red through a curtain of
dust,

White scars seam the alkali plain,

No sound or motion—save over there

A tumble-weed starts on its endless quest

For God knows what—or where.

The brown grass clings to the fields like rust,

But deep in my heart is the sound of rain—

The stealthy moccasined feet of the rain—

Pat, pat on the sun-baked crust;

Like dear remembered dreams of love

In sleepless nights of pain.

The End of the Feast

Now wanton Sunset calls the drooping Hours

And, careless, drains their proffered cup of light,

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

As if this day were but one pearl the more
Dissolved in lingering wine
Of lovely yesterdays;
Burns with the sudden flush
Of fleeting ecstasies,
Then weary sinks into the waiting arms
Of Night.

November

Four lean stalks that clutch and quiver,
Like old men rubbing their palsied hands
With tremulous dread of the winter;
Three dead leaves adrift on the river;
Two sparrows that quarrel and sulk and shiver
In a sudden flurry of icy rain;
One heart that is breaking
With impotent pain,
Knowing its springtime
Comes never again.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

A DAY OF REST

I KNOW that this is Sunday, for the sun
Laughs at the pious primness of my street;
With tight-drawn socks the children walk all
soberly;

And in the glory of her purple silk
With parasol to match,
My neighbor goes to church.

She nods and smiles and says the rain
Is over, and the corn will grow now very fast,
I dully give assent the while I know
That neither rain, nor sun, nor corn,
Can matter in my darkened house
Where Pain hides low.

Oh, for some work to do!
Grim Monday tasks,
To hold my hand and brain in thrall;
Oh, for some sharp-flung stone of sound
To break this shell of silence closing round!
Will night's kind curtain never fall?

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

“MY ROSARY”

“**T**ELL each bead—”

Oh, Father, must I tell them o'er again?
I know them all—I name them one by one—
Tell me at last the lesson's done!

“Unto the end—”

Is this the last? Need I no more
Recount life's failures, o'er and o'er?

“And there—”

Baffled and bruised I find retreat,
After the conflict, rest is sweet—
But what is this? *Another bead?* I'm
blind;
I touch the strand, and there I find

“*A Cross is hung!*”

Give back my rosary!
I never knew what agony
Lay hid in final Calvary,
34

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

As bead by bead I've faltered on
To skull-crowned Golgotha!
Oh, Father, take this cup away!
I'll tell again my rosary
Of still small beads,
Nor murmur now—
If only Thou
Wilt take from me
The *Cross!*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
VOICELESS

I DREAM of gardens strange and rare
Where once I wandered; all the air
Was sweet with bloom and call of bird,
The voice of God was there—I heard
And answered it, for then I had the gift of song.

In wooing winds and wild waves' sweep,
From pools where thought broods long and deep,
I hear it still, the voice of God,
It swells my throat, yet now I plod
With muted lips that ever pray for song.

Waxed I too proud, that I must linger here
Voiceless, alone, yet feel the strain so near
Its heart-break dims mine eye? No note will
come

From out my throbbing throat! What old for-
gotten wrong

Must I thus expiate? Forever dumb
Yet haunted by the memory of song!

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
THRENODY

TH E day grows chill and over all
The pleasant lowlands, shadows fall;
The winds have lost their morning ecstasy
And murmur in a plaintive minor key.

Oh, Lotus of My Heart

Oh, Lotus of my heart

Close, for thy little day is done;
See, where the rushes fall apart
The last warm ray of sun.

Close, for thy little day is done,
Wait not for love's returning;
Love's lightly lost but hardly won,
The candle's spent with burning.

See, where the rushes fall apart,
With keen expectant shiver
Some night-bird skims with amorous art
To tryst upon the river.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

The last warm ray of sun

Falls like a gleaming dart,

Close, for thy little day is done,

Oh, Lotus of my heart!

So Many Ships Have I at Sea

So many ships have I at sea,

I cannot hear the east wind now

Howling down my chimney like a mad banshee,

But I grow sick with fright.

With every gust I seem to see

My gallant ships reel dizzily

On through the night.

So many ships I've sent to sea

With a brave "Yea-ho" in the morning light;

Now I sit by the shore with bated breath

And a clutch at my heart

Like the hand of Death—

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

God grant that one may come back to me
With sails all set
And cargo safe,
And her crew all singing lustily,
Before the night.

An Unprofitable Field

My life is an unprofitable field,
All its soil sour and sullen;
Where in the morning the Sower went forth
And flung the full measure with hope.

Glad was the promise of green in the springtime,
Bare were the fields and brown at the harvest;
Then the plow of the Sower cut deep.

Springtime once more and its promise,
Full even and strong grew the wheat,
And I laughed in my pride.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

But at noon came the Sower.

With finger accusing but patient

He showed me the tares creeping through.

My life is an unprofitable field.

When the Harvester comes for his guerdon,

For each full sheaf that it yields him

He must sort out a bundle of tares

For the burning.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
THE COMING RAIN

NOW with the breath of coming rain
The poplars sway, a troubled row,
Like old wives rocking to and fro
In pain;

They shake their heads in shocked surprise
And whisper underneath their breath,
Like mourners in a house of death,
Then lift their aprons to their eyes
Again.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
SUMMER NIGHT

ONE by one the Twilight drops her
shrouding veils

Before the throne of Night;

Pale amber, purple, amethyst, they fall,

A floating scarf of light;

Now wrapped in thinnest gauze of flame

She takes her stealthy flight.

Suddenly one star flutters out bashfully,

Tremblingly toes the invisible mark

And fumbles her pinafore;

The heavens empty, silent, but a breath before,

Have caught their cue

And marshal all their waiting hosts

In quick review

For Night's recurring pageantry.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
MOUNTAIN SUNSET

ON some such summit Percivale took his
last leave of Galahad:

No doubt they passed such twisted trees, all light-
ning-scarred,

Before they came upon an open spot with lichens
starred

Like this. . . .

And did some miracle befall them there upon the
way?

Or was it just a mountain sunset that they saw?
I wonder—miracles are sore discredited to-day.

There's something in this thin, cold air

Sounds like the long-drawn silver note

That pierced the pale nun's moonlit cell—

'Tis but the water dripping from a rock, you say?

Well—perhaps it is.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Look over there!

The lifted chalice of the Grail
Gleams red through the gathering night!
Brother, look up,
Christ's blood o'erflows the Holy Cup!
But the downcast eyes of Percivale
See naught but the sunset's waning light
O'er a valley choked with sand and thorns.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
A WOMAN SINGS

Love Song

HOW could I know it was my all I gave
A joyous beggar on the way,
So blithe his air,
So bright the day!

I kept not back—and now I am bereft
Of all—and Love?
Love did not stay.

Sleep Song

You say I am cold—I who no longer burn
With the fierce white flame your passion fanned.
To ashes long since—can youth return?
You do not understand.

Because I no longer cry out with pain
When the lash of your scorn cuts deep,
You think that I do not feel—never again
Can your bungling hand jar my jangling nerves
From their sodden sleep.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

My peace is the peace of the sunset sky
That follows the storm's mad blow;
What matters it now? You may come or go,
Like the shadows of clouds that pass me by,
My heart sleeps on in its afterglow.

Death Song

I have known hope—exultant shiver
Of high winds over hills in spring;
I have known love's anticipation—
So brief a thing!

I have known joy—caressing quiver
Of baby-lips on cheek and brow,
And twilight fragrance of a garden,
Perished now.

I have known sorrow—passing glow
Of autumn sunsets burned to gray;
I have heard clods dropped on a coffin,
And turned away.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

What is left then for a woman, wise as I,

Who has tasted joy and sorrow,

Walked with Hope upon the hill-top,

Seen Love die?

Ah, the dream is undelivered,

Big with promise as before—

There is Death's supreme fulfillment—

One thing more.

VAGRANT WINDS

*Just vagrant winds that wander o'er the plains,
Breathing a broken melody,
With joy, like scarlet poppies, flung beneath
Their sober earth-born minstrelsy.*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
VAGRANT WINDS

JUST vagrant winds that wander o'er the
plains,
Breathing a broken melody,
With joy, like scarlet poppies, flung beneath
Their sober earth-born minstrelsy.

In Lilac Time

Who would not sing
In lilac-time?
When every bursting bud can ring
A peal as sweet as fairy-chime,
And all the springing earth a happy rhyme
To God's unspoken thought can bring,
Who would not sing
In lilac-time?

Such shining hosts on joyous wing!
Such radiant reaching things that climb

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

By fair frail hands that clasp and cling!

Such hints of happy summer's prime!

Who would not sing

In lilac-time?

Gypsy Days

Oh, 'tis Autumn on the little road,

The sunlight's dripping through

The woodland shadows, cool and brown,

The sky is blue, so blue!

With whistle clear and a song of cheer

The vagrant takes to the winding lane;

The hills shine fair through the purple haze,

The gypsy days are here again.

Oh, 'tis sweet to live and sweet to love,

And sweet to follow the little road,

With heart as light as the day is bright,

And back without a load.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

To loaf and dream and sit in the sun,
And think of your blessings, every one,
The love that shines in a thousand ways
Through all the length of your gypsy days.

Oh, somebody's sad and somebody's mad,
And somebody else doesn't care,
But why should we grieve when joy's to be had
Out on the little road anywhere;
No time to worry, no time to fret,
The sun is flushing the eastern ways,
And we'll take to the road till the sun has set,
These glorious gypsy days!

The Secret of the Dawn

Oh, the wind sang free at the dawn of day,
Where the tender flush like a rose-crown lay
On the mountain's brow, serene and white,
And my soul threw off the robes of night

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

And, naked, swam in the sea of light;
Straight into the dawn's immensity,
One with the wind and the floating spray.

Into the dawn where the wind sang free,
With fearless stroke went the soul of me,
 Till the wind sank low, and the rose-tints died,
 Then it drifted home through the ebbing tide—
 Chastened and silent, purified,
And silently donned its robes of gray,
But the dawn's white secret it holds for aye.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
COMPENSATION

I HAVE not listened to the mocking-bird
in mellow light

Where jasmine gleams beneath the southern
moon,

But I have heard the robin's riotous delight

At sun's return, poured forth in bubbling tune;

And I have seen my orchard rise and toss

Its foam of blossomed boughs and down across
My path sweet petals drift

All pink and white—

And then I felt no sense of loss.

I have not heard the ocean's organ-strain

Mount to crescendo on the singing sands;

There is a breath across the bending grain

At dawn, that seems the orison of walking lands,

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

And I have caught the still small voice

Of rain at midnight bidding the thirsty fields
rejoice,

And found in the dim sweet song of the wind
and the rain

All music's voice.

I have not seen the far-famed treasures of the
Louvre,

Thrilling my soul with Art's eternal loveliness;
Last week, I saw a wan-faced woman softly move
Weak arms in tender wistfulness

Toward her new-born child,

The radiance shone so fair upon her brow,
I thought of Holy Babe and Mother there,
And wondered if that pictured love

A sweeter smile could wear.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

I have not seen the snowy mountain-peaks

But I have heard men say they are so fair

They tempt the dear dead to pause on their way

Up to heaven. There is a hill in yonder pasture-lot

Afire with painted cups in spring,

And who shall say that God is not

As near to men who lift their faces there to pray

As in some loftier spot?

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
A PAGAN IN CHURCH

THE sermon was tedious that day, without
doubt,

And a tipsy bee on the window-sill
Tumbled and droned, incessantly.
But still I cannot quite make out
How I came to float on a southern sea
With a drunken rollicking pirate crew
From out of a strictly orthodox pew.

Call it fancy, if you will,
Or the ghost of a long-dead memory,
Or lay it all on that sodden bee.

I sailed all day on a sea of glass
Where the sun laughed through a sky of brass—
Then shipwreck came—and heaven grew
Slowly from out two eyes of blue.
My dear, was it you

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

That I found on the shore?

Then why the cross

And the bloody stone?

What gruesome deed must I atone?

Such a safe straight path I am walking now,

But what if the saint with the placid brow

And the scholarly drone,

Could know how my pagan soul flies far

To a wind-swept hill 'neath a southern star

And clings to a cross

In the night alone,

Or gashes its breast

With a knife of stone?

You daintily settle your sleeve's soft lace,

And find the hymn with a deft sweet grace,

Looking at me with accusing face;

Caught me napping, again, you see,

Parson is closing his final *fifthly*,

Out of the window darts buccaneer bee.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

SAADI PASSES BY

L I F E , sang Saadi, is a show,
Passing vapor,
Fleeting breath
On a mirror,
Then comes death.
Thus sang Saadi long ago.

Saadi sang while waxen lilies
Wilted on his brow,
Lilies were the crown of poets
Then—I hear you murmur,
“There are no crowns
For poets now.”

Who was Saadi?

Don't you know?

What the bird is to the tree,
What the star is to the pool,
60

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

What they both are to the garden,
Saadi was to thirsty men
In desert-places
Centuries ago.

Saadi was the soul of music,
Saadi was the soul of beauty
Passing by,
Saadi with the drooping lilies,
Do you think
Such men can die?

Poets, now, are thick as peddlers,
Hawking wares they'd have you buy,
But there's none who sings like Saadi,
Clear and sweet and high;
None like Saadi of the lilies—

No, I cannot tell you why.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Yonder a man is making new songs,
Head bared to the broiling sun;
He laughs like a husky youth
Tossing sheaves to the stacker;
Glad to be husky and strong,
Tossing sheaves in the sun.

He stops singing and tossing sheaves
To wipe the sweat from his face
With his colored bandana,
Looks away from the flying chaff
To the hedge-rows and something that hides
From the clumsy boots of the stackers.

Then he whistles a queer little tune
That hints of wild things in fence-rows;
Thin and sweet, ever more thin and sweet
The tune wavers and trickles,
Sweeter and thinner until it spins to a hair
And snaps—leaving the whistler mute.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

*Can it be the soul of Saadi passed him by,
Saadi with the dying lilies on his lute?*

And one stands deep in the stiff yellow clay
Singing loud as he tosses the skulls
From a graveyard;
And he laughs when his searching spade
Gives back a hollow sound
To show him it strikes on a coffin.
Another frail body unearthed,
Hugging close its poor secret.
Shovel the carrion out,
It shall yield a new song!

One blow of the spade—
The rotten casket is yawning—
But why does he stand and stare?
This scoffer at virtue—
Why does he sink on his knees in the mud
With the skulls grinning at him?
Can it be that the rose of deathless devotion

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Grows stainless and white from the heart of
a woman?

Is it a song that he whispers,
Or is it a *prayer*?

*Can it be the soul of Saadi,
Prince of lovers, hovered there?*

Love, sang Saadi, is a glow
From the Hidden Heart of Fire
Whose symbol is the sun;
Love shall live
When life is done.
Thus sang Saadi, long ago.

Poets now are thick as peddlers,
Hawking wares they'd have us buy,
But there's none who sings like Saadi,
Clear and sweet and high—
None like Saadi of the lilies—
No, I cannot tell you why.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

JOY WALKS IN THE MORNING

I SAID to myself at the dawn,
“The trees are a-tiptoe with wonder
At something that walks on the sky-line there,
I will go out and find it.
It may be that Joy has come out for an airing;
I will lay hold on her garment of rapture
And make me a song.”

The poppy shook out her crumpled skirts
With a freedom that hinted of license,
License in spite of the dull eunuch walls
That restrained her;
But I said as I passed,
“Yours is the passion, and pain of the harem;
I am looking for Joy.”

On my way to the sky-line
I met women and girls who hurried to tramways,

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Women with faces like masks and eyes all un-
kindled

At dawn's holy fire;

Girls with shrill laughter and teasing;

Their presence offended me there in that hour

Like flies on a cup at communion.

Out of the city at last!

The meadow-lark led like a piper,

Piping the village out to the feast and the dancing;

The wind sang a bit and a ballet of poplars

Lifted white petticoats high;

The stage was all set, the baton was lifted,

Joy waited her cue—

But what was that queer little noise

Like one sighing?

That shrill keening noise, half-song and half-
crying?

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Like a helpless thing caught in a trap
And held there so long
It has almost forgotten its freedom,
So long it has been in the dying!

Only a child thinning beets,
It may be a Russian,
His face quite stolid and stupid,
Nothing uncommon—
Yet for the moment he startled me there,
With his numb red hands and his tangled hair,
And broke the thread of my singing.

Back I went through the city gates
And I made me a song as I said I would
At the dawning—
But through it there crept a queer little sighing,
Half-song and half-crying,
Like a helpless thing gnawing its foot in a trap,
And very slow in the dying.

A HANDFUL OF PURPLE ASTERS

*Purple, the color of passion and prayer,
Washed o'er the mesas everywhere,
Deep in the dust where the foot has trod,
Pointing the vagrant soul to God.*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
THE SQUIRREL CAGE

CAN this be, then, the end and meaning
of our days,
This ceaseless round of unavailing toil at trivial
tasks—

So busy getting things by which to live
That life itself, unheeded, passes by;
Forever treading at the fast revolving wheel
Of circumstance, like squirrel in a cage?

Yet I have dreamed that Life and Work were one
And both of them were holy things
Appointed to some wondrous use divine.

There's something wrong about our balance, some-
where,

When it sets the soul's appendages above
The soul itself, when men are so engrossed
With bigger houses, broader lands, that they for-
get

Their rightful business is to build a house eternal.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Next year, we say, by saving we may take a trip
And see grand sights, 'tis well worth working,
 saving for,
While we forget that we are being whirled with
 lightning speed
Upon our cosmic journey through the stars
And only need to wait and see the universe
Unfold before us, as we ride.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

PILGRIMAGE

THERE'S a pilgrim path I've followed
all my lifetime, o'er and o'er,

To the church down in the village from my cottage
on the moor ;

Yet altars have I that no man knows,

Strange, secret shrines where my foot never goes,

But there in the silence my soul has flown

And bowed there in worship

All alone.

There's a trail up in the Yukon, underneath the
northern star,

I shall never see the Yukon, now, for I am old,
and it is far ;

But when the moon hangs ghastly white

O'er the frosty blue of the plains, and a coyote
leaps

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

In stealthy flight,
I am one with the struggling, savage soul
Of the Arctic night.

There's an island in the ocean where the twilight
breezes blow,
And it never ceases calling, though I know I
may not go,
I can hear the singing coolies
With their wailing a-h, e-e-h, o-o-h,
Where the temple-bells are pealing, soft and slow,
And there I have an altar
Where my soul bows low.

There's a garden on a hillside, set with gnarled
old olive-trees,
And a shrine that's worn and polished, by a mil-
lion bended knees;
I may not know the meaning
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IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Of that heaven-protected spot,
But my soul has had its travail,
Whose has not?
It has known its sweat and anguish
All alone on weary knee,
As it faced the crucifixion
In its own Gethsemane.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
THE WATCHMAN ON THE
TOWER

Out of the Dark

OUT of the dark the Formless comes
creeping,

Out of the terrible silent dark;
Angel or demon, to cherish or crush,
Wrongs to avenge, or sorrows to hush,
Out of the pain and the dark.

Out of the pain the Nameless comes leaping,
Out of the pitiful patient pain;
Coming to cradle, or going to grave,
Death-throes or birth-pangs, to rend or to save,
Out of the dark and the pain.

Into the dawn the Spirit comes sweeping,
Into the blood-stained dawn;
Stronger than Death and triumphant o'er Dust,
Mounting from ashes of hatred and lust,
Into the pale sweet dawn.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

The Threshing-Floor

God, even our God, hath said :

I will make of these nations a threshing-floor ;

I will tread out the wheat and the chaff.

The nations have heard, the floor is spread,

And the blood from the patient trampled dead

Mounts up to the bridle-rein.

God, even our God, hath said :

I will build me a home for my weary dead,

A place where many mansions are ;

But the wheat and the chaff I must first thresh
out,

And the wind shall scatter the chaff about,

But the wheat I will put in my bin.

Not as the blind, unfeeling grain

Do the nations go to the threshing-floor,

But as gods that know both good and ill,

They march to their fate with a right good-will,

With laughter and song and a merry shout,

Getting the harvest in.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
PASSING BY

FROM wind-swept mesas of the West,
Across the prairies thick with corn
A silent traveler is borne
Toward home—and rest.

Why do men gather along the way,
Forsaking the fields with their ripened grain
To catch a glimpse of a speeding train?

Because the still form lying there
Is but the symbol, somehow, of the thing
That each man feels to be his own,
Some latent greatness, unexpressed;
Because each woman with a babe against her
breast

Weeps while she whispers, "Such as he,
God grant my little son may sometime be!"

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

From sunlit steeps of the golden west,
Through weeping prairies thick with corn
A silent traveler is borne;
Hammer and forge all quiet lie,
The reaper is still—
And nobody wonders why—
For the *Soul of America* passes by.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

MEMORY

DO you remember, Beloved, how you sat
Engrossed in some task you were work-
ing at

That day on the low green hill?

Do you remember, Beloved, still?

There was a gate not quite pushed to

And to tease you I ran and just slipped through—

Then the gate closed fast.

In vain I cried

And called to you on the other side.

Do you remember, Beloved, and do you wait

For me beyond this fast-barred gate?

And do you sometimes batter and cry

Besieging Life's portals, even as I

Beat on Death's walls in wild dismay?

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Do you remember how we two
Danced o'er the meadows when day was new,
Peeped through the gates of Life,
And I slipped through?
Are the aster-meadows still purple-blue?
Beloved, I *know* and *wait*—do you?

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

THE MINOR SINGERS

THE eagle's practiced wings that never
tire,

Trained through long eons to unerring flight,
With steady sweep can reach the lofty height
To which the unfledged meadow-birds aspire;
They breast the storms impelled by mad desire
To cleave the mists and gathering shades of
night

And find the radiance of the peak's pure light,
And there to float with vibrant heart on fire.

Life holds her heights that only they may scale
Who through the ages grew a surer wing,
Such find with ease the sunlit solitudes;
But there are those who still must strive and fail,
Essay small flights and falter as they sing,
Beaten by winds of chance and shifting
moods.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

MY PRAYER

FOR boon of deathless song no more I
plead,

Nor fame enduring through the years;

But if one soul, forlorn and sad,

Shall listen in an hour of bitter need,

To faltering verse of mine,

And con through tears

Its faulty line,

I shall be glad.

No more I ask that it be given me

To seek the thrall of things remote

In alien land;

This, now, my plea:

Open my eyes to wonders near at hand,

The glories of the everyday,

O, let me understand!

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Let me be eyes for those who stumble on

In darkened paths of doubt and pain,

Blind to the miracle of dawn,

The sacrament of rain;

Let me point out the wonder of the way,

Each common sight with gladness filled,

Creation's brimming cup, new-spilled,

With every day.

If there be those who never saw

The sunset sudden fall apart

And show within its riven heart

The lifted chalice of the Grail,

While night's gray shadows shrink and pale

And earth clasps heaven in glad surprise,

For such as these, I pray,

Let me be eyes!

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

PROPHECY

SOMEWHERE Beauty dwells, all un-
defiled,

For I have seen a rose unfold

At dawn,

And wonder grow

In the eyes of a child.

Somewhere Love shall live, all unafraid,

For I have seen a woman clasp Death's hand

At birth,

And pass into the shadows

Undismayed.

Somewhere Life shall live, beyond the blue,

For I have seen the veil wear thin

And fall apart—

And the face of God

Shine through.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
ANSWERED

IN my great loneliness I prayed
That God would give me death,
Since in life's loveliness of love
I had no share;
I prayed His last great boon of sleep
Might fall upon me unaware.

A radiance mild,
A voice as soft as prayer,
And then God said—
Impatient child,
See what I've kept for thee
All undefiled,
Through all eternity!
I raised my head
And *you* were there.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
THE BELATED GUEST

THE last feeble flame from my lantern
flickers and dies;

Like an outcast I creep to the fast-closed door,
I, who was bidden to thy table, an honored guest.

The faint sweet sound of the flute comes sobbing
Upon the night;

My soul cries out for its Beloved,
And will not be still;

Beside my Beloved a garland of lilies
Lies dying—

No other may wear it;

In His compassionate eyes a sorrow

No other may sing away;

While I wait alone in the night,

My bared head bowed low.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

I, upon whom He counted,
Have *failed Him*—
This is the weight of my woe.

Why did I fail Thee?
Oh, my Beloved!
The journey was planned with careful thought;
My garlands were fresh and my robes were spot-
less;
I had oil and to spare.

It was the crimson flower on the moor
First drew me from the path—
I thought to pluck it for my wreath,
'Twas then I fell and lost my way.
Night gathered fast and well I knew
The doors must soon be closed.
A woman begged for oil to light her on the path,

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

I gave and hastened on.

A beggar child held up his wasted hands

And smiled to see my crimson flower,

I paused—

'Twas then the rain began to fall.

The door is closed,

Oh, my *Beloved*, *I have come—*

Too late!

What tender radiance lights this bitter night?

My oil is spent—

Why 'tis the *woman* that I met,

She holds her lamp on high!

No, 'tis the *beggar child*

He holds a crimson flower!

'Tis my Beloved waits beside me here

Lo, in His tender eyes I see—*myself!*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
TWILIGHT AT BETHANY

IT was the twilight hour at Bethany;
The sun's last rays, belated, lingered yet
Upon the southern slopes of Olivet,
Covering their shoulders, gray and old,
With mantles of a rusty gold.
Now, Lazarus, returned from daily toil,
Sat, musing, underneath the myrtle-tree,
As was his wont at evening time;
With eyes that rested not on harmony
Of purple hills, close-set, nor fertile soil
Yellow with harvest's goodly prime.

The flocks were safely folded and the hush
Of eve unbroken, save for recurring rush
Of turning wheel from out the cottage-door,
Where Martha labored still, in waning glow.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Now Mary, worn with weeping, wasted so,
A shadow moved scarce lighter o'er the floor,
Came softly forth and sank beside his knee,
Stroking, in silence, that great calloused hand
Which sought her own in ready sympathy.

At length, she spoke :

“Now He is gone,

I love to think of that blest land
He told us of, that far country
To which we all must go ;
And still my truant thoughts run on
Before, to guess death's mystery.
And oft I ask, 'What do they there,
Those happy ones, released from daily care
For food, and for the raiment that we wear
With so much anxious thought?'
Fearing to break the silence laid
Upon thy lips, I've asked thee naught

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Of those dread days within the tomb;
But thou hast passed through death's dark womb
Into the light, whilst I, who played
With thee in childhood, stumble blindly on,
Clutching at shadows in the gloom.

"That day upon the hills, hast thou forgot?
We led the flocks up from the pastures brown
And sere, to find some uncropped, greener spot;
And there we marveled, looking down,
Upon the wondrous beauty of it all:
The vale below; the tiny river's fall;
The sky above; swift-changing grace
Of clouds that veiled Shekinah's face.
And as we dreamed, we wondered who
Let in the weary flocks at night;
The sleepy flocks that patient wait
At heaven's close-shut pasture-gate.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

“Then came thy promise: If the golden bar
By some strange chance should sudden fall ajar
That shuts us from the fields of blue,
Swift wouldst thou run, and call me, too,
There we would fold our flocks for aye.
Brother, that gate swung wide one summer’s day,
Safe hast thou passed the flaming sword
Set there to guard, *hast thou no word?*”

Then Lazarus, as one awakened from a dream
Of bliss, the while his wistful heart slept on,
Said, falteringly, as one who fain would please
Yet knows not how the task shall be begun,
“What is it, sister, thou wouldst know?”

Thus Mary questioned, timidly and slow:
“O Lazarus, *our fathers taught*
That some must suffer in the fires of hell
For their misdeeds; didst thou see aught
Of that dread place, before He bade thee rise?”

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

"I saw *myself* and knew full well
The whole that I was meant to be and do;
It passed before me in review,
Swifter than spoken thought.
I saw the forces of despair
Creep in where all, before, was fair,
Unto the death they fought,
This dual pair!
And *then*, of *hell* I was aware."

"Did fiend or demon cross thy way?"

"I heard the voice of Chaos,
Whining in the dark,
And shuddered in a wild alarm;
I saw the loathsome form of Fear
Squat, toad-like, in my path,
But found he could not harm;
I heard the mocking sneer

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Of adverse elements who came
Hoping to add my feeble spark
To their consuming flame,
Or leave it dark."

*"Now what of heaven and its golden way
By angels trod, hast thou to say?"*

"Of angels with their harps and crowns
I saw *not one!* . . .
But I was vaguely made aware
As I hastened on,
Of life, exultant, everywhere,
Through the far-flung spaces;
Of radiant faces,
Remembered and dear;
Of dim, star-hung places
Where melody whirled,
Music where *sound* was *not*,

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Nor ever an *ear!*

Strange banners of color, unfurled,

With luminous graces;

A glory from out of the core of the world,

All sound and all color transcending,

In *light* and in *silence* the *whole comprehending.*"

"*And God,*" she whispered, "*what of Him?*"

Until the last I've left the moan

Of the earth-soul—

Didst see His throne,

Guarded by flaming cherubim?"

"I saw the Eternal Shuttle playing

Swiftly, to and fro

In endless web of days;

I saw life's fabric grow

And not one slender thread was snapped,

But each to other by the Weaver lapped

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

With Purpose Absolute;

I saw fair Form from out the Formless rise;

I saw Creation's never-ending flow—

The meaning I could but surmise,

And with the wonder of it rapt

I have sat mute.

I felt, at times, some August Will

O'erpowering me with awful chill,

But swift to drive away my fear

Came Love, a warm, enshrouding Love,

As if the Eternal Heart beat near;

But so,

I often feel it *here*,

At *Bethany*—

They who find not God at twilight,

Walking in His garden, fair,

They who thrill not with His nearness

In His green earth, everywhere,

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Will not find Him when they've flown
Through trackless space and waked the echoes
Of all chaos with their moan."

A sudden silence fell upon the two.
One star trembled over Olivet,
As it had done for eons ere a foot was set
In Palestine, and still shall do
When hearts of men are dust;
Soothing their restless dreams, their lust
Of change, with its untiring changelessness.
Gone was the twilight's wavering phantasy
And it was night at Bethany.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
LAY THOU THE CROSS

BE with me when the shadows fall
And darkness shuts away the light;
Be with me, I am after all
A little child, afraid of night.

Be with me, Father, I am weak,
So frail in spite of boasted strength,
So often leave the heights I seek
To toil the desert's weary length.

Take Thou my hand, walk by my side,
Lay on my shrinking back the cross;
Through weakness I have long denied
And now my soul feels bitter loss.

My soul consents, it tries in vain
To walk the way of sacrifice;
The flesh cries out and writhes in pain,
Lay Thou the cross and help me rise!

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
A SONG OF EXILE

AS some sad exile from the land of birth
Turns longing eyes and pictures o'er
and o'er

Each well-worn path that he may tread no more,
So turns my soul from fairest scenes of earth;
Forever hearing in its haunts of mirth

Faint echoes from the homeland's distant shore,
Waiting the opening of the fast-closed door,
Holding all else, beside, of little worth.

What do they now, those friends released from
care

For food and raiment that we mortals wear
With so much anxious thought? Has Lethe
brought

Forgetfulness of folly? Is there naught
Of that still radiance they with us may share?
Still to the homeland turns my longing prayer.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

“SIR, WE WOULD SEE
JESUS”

“SIR, we would see Jesus. Marvel you
That we forsake sun-bright Apollo and
that maid

Of Ephesus, fair-haired and chaste, to seek
A man of Nazareth, a carpenter? We, of Greece,
With all our gods immortal, our learning and our
art,

Still search for truth, however new and strange
That truth may come, and he, they say,
Hath somewhat deeper delved
Into the mysteries of life and death
Than even they, our teachers—drawing back the
veil

And bringing men, long dead, from out the sepul-
cher—

Yet not for *that*, we came. Though he might raise
A dozen dead men 'twere of less avail
Than that he taught one man to *live*.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

"We have seen *him*, *Gadarus*, that mad beast
In whom the passions, uncontrolled, raged wild,
Consuming all they touched, by gentleness
Of this same Jesus, calmed and made a man
indeed.

The gods of Greece are great and men shall praise
Their strength and loveliness, immortal, yet
They taught not men to live as does this man of
Galilee.

"Sir, we of glorious Greece stoop not to beg,
And least of all from that mean race of usurers
From which he springs. . . . Great is our need,
We crave your intercession—here is gold—
These jewels, if your Master would be *king*
Will help to seat him on his throne;
If he be *man*, and sore beset,
These blades shall free, or we will perish at his
side;
If he be God, ah Jew, if he—be—*God!*

Enough, go tell your Master that we wait!"

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

THERE WILL COME AUTUMN
TWILIGHTS OF GRAY RAIN

THERE will come Autumn twilights
of gray rain,

Beloved, let us hoard from Summer's largess
ample store

And bank our hearth, ere the long nights come
again.

Lest when the darkness falls with shrouded moon,
We face an empty grate, and the creeping chill
Force us to sodden sleep's surcease, too soon.

There will come Autumn twilights of gray rain—
Beloved, while life yields such sunlit hours
Come, let us bank the hearth again!

IN EARTHEN BOWLS
SINGING SOFT AND LOW

SINGING soft and singing low
I plant my poppies in a row,
Then tuck them in and bid them grow
To gladsome height;

Singing soft and singing low
From shelf to table, to and fro,
I bear my plates, a goodly show
Of blue and white;

Singing soft in evening glow
I watch the silver waters flow
Upon the peaceful sands below
In waning light;

Still at my window singing low
I see a silent boat move slow
With shadowy sails that shoreward blow
In stealthy flight;

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

Soon I shall hear a muffled "Ho!"
Then forth to meet that boat shall go,
Still singing soft and singing low,
Into the night.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

THE FLIGHT

TH E low-lying clouds are dipped in rose,
Like the flush of a gray dove's breast,
And the silver wraith of a dying moon
Slips over the hill's dark crest;
Through a cleft in the rocks a bird flies home,
Home to its secret nest.

Such a night for a journey, my soul cries out,
Such a wondrous night for a quest!

Some night when the clouds are flushed with rose,
And the moon hangs pale and high,
I shall take my flight o'er the darkling hills
Straight into the pale-green sky;
Swift and sure as the night-bird flies
I shall answer the homing-cry.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

And no one then shall say me nay
Or tell me the way is far,
I who have walked such safe small paths
Shall flit from star to star,

Such a night for a journey, my soul cries out,
Such a night to go winging free
With only a wisp of a lonely cloud
And a dear dead moon to see.

THE FLEECE OF GOLD

*The hearts of men are stirred with strange unrest,
They still must seek the hidden fleece of gold,
That hangs within the dragon's dreadful hold,
There in the West, the soul-compelling West.*

To Denver, the city which has ever been to me most hospitable, and to the many friends within her gates, this little tale of her first settler is respectfully dedicated.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

THE FLEECE OF GOLD

WHEN Jason, to the strains of
Orpheus' lyre,

Straight into sunset turned enchanted prow
And faced the fiery beasts with dauntless brow,
He waked the slumbering spark of mad desire.
Now, ever as the sun, with slanting ray,
Falls on the huddled flocks that patient wait
For folding, outside heaven's pasture-gate,
Warming with drifted gold their coats of gray,
The hearts of men are stirred with strange
unrest—

They still must seek the hidden fleece of gold,
That hangs within the dragon's dreadful hold,
There in the West, the *soul-compelling West*.

When birds were nesting and the streams ran clear,
With hope of pasture greening all the land,

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

In Georgia's cotton-fields men dreamed of gold
That lay, unclaimed, within the mountain's heart;
Like Jason's half-a-hundred heroes, bold,
On daring quest they start.

Late in the Spring,
When o'er the dull brown earth was softly spread
A robe of green, shot through with threads of rose,
And insects whirled on busy, tremulous wing,
A few lean Kansans joined the company.
Tall men, sun-burned, with leathern neck and arm,
Grim, silent men, who stopped to shift a trickling
quid
Before reply; men whom the desert could not
harm.

By day, the men moved silent, yet alert,
To strike the coiling snake and watch for haze
Of distant fire, to keep the beasts from hurt,

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

To track the antelope and find a spot
To camp where freshet might not overtake.

But when the crackling fire of cottonwood
Sent mystic circles far into the night,
They told again the all-engrossing tales
Of hidden gold; of cities buried from the light
For centuries, where cheapest common dish
Was from the precious metal cast.

Then one

They called "the parson" for his quiet ways,
A story of the *Spanish quest* began:

*"It was a Pawnee brave first brought the tale
Of wealth uncoun- ted, in the North and West,
To colonies of Spain, rousing the lust
For gold.*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

*When with the rising sap the buds
Began to swell, he led them forth, a band
Of hardy, hopeful men.*

*The summer passed;
Along the Arkansas the fallen leaves
Lay thick and dead, yet still no word to those
Who waited for the pots of gold.*

*One day,
When keen and blue was all the autumn air,
A crippled beggar, out of human form
Twisted and bent by some mischance, half-blind
With desert-glare, came to the settlement
And begged for bread. To every question still
He made reply, "Cibola, I have seen
The city of the dead!" And then they knew
Him for the piteous broken wreck of one
Who sought the fabled city in the spring.*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

*No clear account of that lost caravan
He ever gave, for something so intense
Lay back of all the torture and despair,
To speak of it brought madness to his brain.*

But this the tale he told of Cibola:

*"The Indian lost the trail, or else he lied;
We wandered far afield in trackless wild
No white man's foot had ever trod. A land
Of desert, cut with interlacing seams
Where blessed water trickled from the sand.
A few lost men, we followed still each trace
Of savage or of beast,—at every turn
We thought to see the golden city stand.*

*Alone, at last, I crept into the narrow mouth
Of a great canyon, struggling madly with
Its tangled scrub, and there I found the thing*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

*We sought, the tomb of far-famed Cibola!
Within the rocky canyon's side was built
The dwelling of some vanished race. No sign
Of life was in the silent place; no gold
In heaped-up store, only rude implements
Of stone, a few dried grains of yellow maize
Upon the floor.*

*In rage I stumbled on until I came
Upon a cave where sunken pots of clay
Adorned with feathers, stood in solemn row;
Now for the gold! I cried, and overturned
The smallest in my way. A few dried bones,
A tiny skull, some clumsy playthings
Rattled out with awful thud.*

*My blood
That late had surged with angry heat, ran cold
And froze within me at the sight I saw:*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

*Beside the burial-pots a woman crouched,
Unburied and alone, no hand to soothe
Her last death-agony, no child to bring
The food and water to her side, no mate
To lay her shrunken form away—herself
The last of all her world . . .*

Still watching for a footstep at the door—

*I turned and fled from the accursed spot,
Friends, I have seen the woman God forgot!"*

The "parson" bowed his head and spoke no more,
The fire burned low, and still the haunting howl
Of hungry coyotes pierced the chilly air;
In silent reverie they sat, the spell
Of that dead woman on them still.

Next day, a band of friendly Cherokees
Came up with gifts of fresh-killed antelope,

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

In token of good-will. By pipes and beads
Beguiled, they lingered with the caravan.
But there were some who shook their grizzled
heads

And muttered, sullen, underneath their breath,
Of treacherous guides and wanton massacre;
And then they spoke of *Humana* again,
How as he slept, the red men lit the circle
Dread, of flame, about his helpless camp;
And only one escaped that holocaust,
And he, by strategy of Indian maid.

These murmurs reached the watchful leader's ear
And led to council round the evening fire.

Thus *Russell* spoke: "The Indians know the way,
They know the springs, the treacherous river-beds,
They know the mountain-trails, the gulches where
The nuggets big as hailstones lie—"

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

(‘Or punkins, sir,’ a hopeful Kansan cried.)

“Who knows what treachery Humana first
To red man showed, what spark of hate he lit
To kindle his own funeral-pyre? No fear
Have I of red man, unbetrayed, in short,
The Cherokees shall stay!”

Right cunningly,
Of their red comrades, day by day, they sought
Some clue to hidden gold, picking up along
Their path the shining stones, then holding up
A well-filled pipe, as pay for such.

At length
The purple shoulders of the mountain heaved
From out the tedious plain, kindling their eyes
With glad expectancy.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

An Indian youth

Sped on before, spurring his fleet mustang
Toward the distant hills. Two days they traveled
Ere the brave returned and sought the tall white
chief.

With great delight, a yellow aspen leaf
He showed, by summer's alchemy too soon
Transmuted into gold.

"Plenty, plenty gold,
Soon the Great Spirit make upon the hills!"
He cried.

Then all the gladness in him died
At their contemptuous smile.

The red men smoked
About their council-fire till late that night
And with the morning brought "Four-fingered
Joe,"

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

A half-breed who could speak the white man's
tongue.

The old chief squatted by the fire and spoke,
And thus "Four-fingered Joe" interpreted:

*"The white man ever cries for gold, more gold,
That word the first the redman learn to speak;
Gold the Great Spirit gives, he values not,
Nor for the gold of ripened maize he seeks.
But he would rend the shivering mountain's
heart
To find the demon-gold hid deep.*

This, then,

The red men say:

*Two sleeps the mountains lie
Away. The red man may not go to demon-gold
But he will point the way." . . .*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

The old chief rose and silent stood as if
In doubt or grief; in sudden passion, then,
He raised his arms and swayed to rhythmic chant:

*"I hear the Great Spirit,
He mutters in anger,
The storm-cloud He mounts,
His breath goes before Him,
The trees bend and sway:
He seizes His bow
And His great gleaming arrow,
The rock's heart He smites.*

*"Go, follow the dart
From the bow of the Spirit,
The angry Great Spirit
Who rides on the storm;
There shall the gold
Of the demon lie bare;*

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

*The wrath of the Smiter is on it,
Beware!"*

In silence, grim, the Cherokee mounted
And rode away.

The Georgians and the Kansans panned the
streams

Between them and the range; the Fountain
And the Platte; a few small grains of glittering
dust

For guerdon of their toil. Far as the eye
Could see the solitary plains were set
To purple harmonies and many a tuft
Of grass a crown of creamy yucca wore.

But they were men of purpose, stern, and came
Not there to dream in mountain majesties;
And ever as the flakes of gold eluded still
Their touch, the men grew restive, spoke
Of home and women waiting for them there.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

By Cherry Creek a Kansan spoke his mind.

"There is no gold in this vile land," he said,
A country fit for coyotes or for Injun breed;
These barren plains can never feed a man
Nor pay his sweat with bread!"

At dawn,
A score of disappointed men rode to the south.

The few who still remained toiled on, ranging
The creeks on either hand with feverish haste;
With eyes that noted not the blossoms crushed
Beneath their feet; with ears that hearkened not
To soaring meadow-lark, or her alarm
At jarring human voice within that solitude.
But not one nugget in their pans at night
Bade hope live on. With patient eyes that spoke
Dumb question, still they looked to him who led
Their quest, then laid them down to troubled sleep.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

The warm June night slept silently and fair,
God's peace upon it like a mantle laid,
The great range brooded, watchful and aware
Of mystic shifting shadows o'er it played.

Before the dying fire *Russell* bowed,
In agony of thought as deep as prayer,
And through the depths of that dark cloud
Of anguished doubt, he caught a vision fair :

He saw the Pale-Face Gold, a phantom, glide
Through many a gulch and hidden dell,
But as she fled, her yellow cloak spread wide
And on the barren plains it fell ;
He saw a city rise with mart and spire,
Where teeming life passed swiftly to and fro,
He saw the waters flow by man's desire
To feed the fertile plains below.

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

The fire died; the faithful few slept on.
Now *Russell* rose and faced the kindling dawn;
The peaks caught up a hint of rosy gleam,
And blushed through all their sparkling veils of
snow;

Around him played dim phantoms of his waking
dream.

With many a grimace, now, and muttered oath,
By sun's first rays aroused, the men awoke
And saw their leader standing, silent, loath
To break the spell of mystery on him laid
By that night's phantasy.

“*We stay,*” he said,
“*If only one will bear me company!*”

The red man's gold still on the aspen gleams,
The white man's gold is washed from shifting
sand,

And over all that once forsaken land
126

IN EARTHEN BOWLS

The Spirit-gold of ripened grain now streams.
A city stands with sunlit dome and spire,
Fair gleaner with her golden sheaves complete,
Like Ruth, she nestles at the mountain's feet;
As *Russell* saw her by his dying fire,
The night his troubled soul found hope and peace,
And saw, afar, the *winning* of the *fleece*.

(1)

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